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Churches of Christ Salute You with a Herald of Truth: January Report and February Sermons

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Churches of Christ salute you



JANUARY REPORT AND FEBRUARY SERMONS — 1956

HERALD OF TRUTH

WHAT HAPPENED ON PENTECOST?

By JAMES D. WILLEFORD

Radio Sermon No. 210

February 5, 1956

While Jesus was dying on the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Have you ever wondered if this prayer were answered? Perhaps you have asked, "Could men who cried 'crucify Him, crucify Him' ever be forgiven? Could men who spat upon Him, slapped Him, and blasphemed His name ever receive His mercy and grace?"

Yes, the Lord's prayer was answered, and His murderers were forgiven! The whole story is recorded within one chapter of the New Testament. What a chapter, and what a thrill to read it! It not only tells how God forgave the men who crucified His Son, but it also gives His plan of salvation for every sinner in the world. It is filled with the love of God, and its message has brought hope to many sincere people just like you. That chapter is the second of the book of Acts.

When Christ commissioned His apostles to preach the remission of sins in His name, He commanded them to tarry in Jerusalem until they received power from on high (Luke 24:47-49). He promised that they would receive this power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. The second chapter of Acts begins with these words: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4).

This Scripture identifies the day on which the remission of sins was first preached. It was the day of Pentecost. This was one of the three annual festivals at which all of the male Jews were required to be present. It was held in Jerusalem just fifty days after the Passover Feast.

The day of Pentecost was the day of beginnings. It was on this day that the full gospel, including the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, was first preached. On Pentecost was the beginning of the remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 2:38). The first announcement that Jesus had been seated on the throne of David was made on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29-35). This day marked the beginning of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15-17; Acts 2). And it was on this memorable day that the Holy Spirit came to guide the apostles into all truth (John 14:26; Acts 2:1-4). Ten years after the events of this great day, the apostle Peter referred to Pentecost as "the beginning" (Acts 11:15).

The day of Pentecost was a most opportune time for the Son of God to establish His church, and to offer the forgiveness of sins

through His shed blood. The Bible says that on this day, "there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). What an audience! These men were devout. They had come to Jerusalem for one purpose, and that was to worship God. So this was a select audience of honest, upright men devoted to religious matters, who had gathered from every nation under heaven. What an opportunity for spreading the gospel! By planting the seed of the kingdom in the hearts of these men, the apostles could send them back to their homes as missionaries of the cross. They could tell the story of Jesus and His love which they heard on this day of Pentecost in the capital city of the Jewish nation.

Jerusalem was the appropriate place for "the beginning." The prophet Isaiah had said, "for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3). When the Son of God gave the world-wide commission to His apostles, He said, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46, 47). Christ further instructed His apostles by saying unto them, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). From the second chapter of Acts we learn that the "power from on high" came (in the form of the Holy Spirit) on the day of Pentecost.

Have you ever wondered why Christ commanded His apostles to wait for "power from on high"? He gave them this order because the message they were to deliver to mortal man was fraught with such momentous importance that He wanted them to have divine aid in its delivery. The Bible says that after the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, they "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Their message was not their own, but every word of it was dictated by the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit not only filled them and inspired them, but so took possession of them as to control their vocal organs, and, by means of those organs, to give utterances to His own words.

The recorded sermon which was delivered on the day of Pentecost was spoken by the apostle Peter. The Bible says, "But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words" (Acts 2:14). The sermon delivered by the apostle on this day was a masterpiece. "Never did mortal lips announce in so brief a space so many facts of import so terrific to the hearers. We might challenge the world to find a parallel to it in the speeches of her orators, or the songs of her poets. There is not such a thunderbolt in all the burdens of the prophets of Israel, or among the voices which echo through the Apocalypse. It is the first public announcement to the world of a risen and glorified Redeemer" (J. W. McGarvey, *Commentary on Acts*, p. 30).

In his sermon the apostle used three arguments to convince his

Jewish audience that Jesus was the Messiah. In his first argument the apostle said, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know" (Acts 2:22). The apostle showed that God's approval rested upon Jesus; for the Father had wrought great miracles through Him. It is likely that Peter referred in detail to many of the miracles as proof. The circumstances would call for him to enforce the argument with all the power he could summon, and the proof he offered was so convincing that it was not called in question.

In his second argument the apostle Peter appealed to the Scriptures which were written by their own prophet David. He shows that David could not have been speaking of himself when he said, "Thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades, neither wilt thou give thy Holy One to see corruption," for David "died and was buried, and his tomb is with us unto this day," but that "he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ" (Acts 2:27-31, ASV). In effect, Peter said to his Jewish brethren, "If you will accept our own prophet David, you must admit the resurrection of Christ, for he foretold this very thing."

In Peter's third argument for the resurrection of Christ, he presented the testimony of at least twelve men. He said, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). The apostles had every means of knowing whether or not Jesus was raised. They were with Him daily while He lived, and they saw Him after He arose. They could not have been mistaken. They were willing to stand up in Jerusalem, where Jesus was crucified, and in the presence of His murderers say, "God raised Him from the dead, for we saw Him." They gave this testimony, knowing that they might suffer death for it. No man will knowingly tell a falsehood under such circumstances, and stick to it.

On the basis of all the evidence which Peter had presented, he said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). The Father had made Him Lord by causing Him to sit on God's own throne, to rule over angels and men; and He had made Him Christ by causing Him to sit on the throne of David according to the promise. It was God's throne, because it was the throne of universal dominion; and it was David's throne, because it was the lineal descent from David which made Jesus the rightful king. From this conclusion the Jews learned that, contrary to their previous conception, the promised Christ was to sit, not on an earthly throne, however glorious, but on the heavenly throne.

The crucifixion had been the storm period in the world's history, but Pentecost is the time when the clouds break away and the sun shines in all of its beauty and splendor. The sermon delivered by Peter on the day of Pentecost was four thousand years in preparation. Sometimes preachers boast of being able to build a sermon in an hour or so, but it took Jehovah four thousand years to build the sermon of Pentecost. The sermon preached by Peter had much the style of

the sermons preached by the Lord Himself. It was plain, concise and courageous.

In this great sermon the Holy Spirit did just what Christ promised He would do: He convinced men of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. It was the Spirit who preached through the apostle Peter this wonderful discourse. The sermon is logical, reaching from man to God. It is saturated with truth and eloquence. Those who heard were not in a mood to applaud or flatter. Some of them had pierced the side of the Son of God only a few days before, and He now plunges the sword of the Spirit into their hearts, and in groans and pain, conscious of their condemnation, they beg for mercy.

The very men who, a few days before, had cried, "Crucify Him, crucify Him," now cry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Since Peter began to speak a change had taken place in both their convictions and their feelings. They now believe that Jesus is the Christ, and they are pierced to the heart with the thought that they have murdered Him. Luke traces their change from unbelief to faith, to what they had heard. He says, "Now when they heard this they were pricked in their hearts" (Acts 2:37). This exemplifies Paul's teaching, that "faith comes by hearing; and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). The change of heart which God sought to bring about in these people was effected through the words which the Spirit caused Peter to speak.

These men of Israel were overwhelmed by the proof of Christ's divinity. They were left not an inch of ground on which to stand. If there were ever any people prepared to prove that Peter did not present the facts certainly these people were. They were in the very shadow of the cross, in the very city where the crucifixion had taken place. They were parties to the death of the Lord, and every detail was fresh in their minds. Like brave and honest men, they acknowledged their mistake, and they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

This was the first time this question was asked in the Christian dispensation, the first time since the death of Christ. How important, how far reaching it must be. The answer has to do with the eternal destiny of the soul of man. How anxious were these people for the answer. As believers they asked what to do and "Peter," speaking by God's Spirit, "said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). The men of Israel realized that they were guilty of the Lord's death, and they wanted to know how that guilt could be removed. The Holy Spirit directed Peter to tell them they must repent and be baptized. Friends, is there anything in that answer that is difficult to understand? They were to do two things for the remission of sins. They were to repent and they were to be baptized.

How many preachers in America will give to sinners the same answer that Peter gave the Jews on the day of Pentecost? A few

weeks ago I bought the Olive Pell Bible, and when I read Acts 2:38 I found that the author had deleted the very purpose for which men must repent and be baptized. In this Bible, Acts 2:38 reads, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The clause "for the remission of sins" is left out entirely.

In answer to the question, "Why should those who have believed be baptized," the president of a Baptist Institute has said, "Never in order to be saved, but because they have already been saved. A sick child, wishing baptism, said, 'Mother, I hope I won't die tonight.' 'Why?' 'Because I haven't been baptized.' 'Do you think baptism will save you?' asked the mother. 'No,' said the child; 'I am already saved, for I am trusting in Jesus, but I wouldn't like to go to heaven without doing what the Lord told me to do.'" (W. W. Hamilton, president of the Baptist Bible Institute, New Orleans, La., pub. by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville, Tennessee). If a person can go to heaven "without doing what the Lord told me to do," what did Christ mean in Luke 6:46, when He said, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" What did our Lord mean when He said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you?" (John 15:14). What did the apostle John mean when he said, "Hereby we do know that we know Him (Christ), if we keep His commandments"? (1 John 2:3).

In answer to the question, "Why should those who have believed be baptized," the President of the Bible Institute says, "Never in order to be saved." How can this answer be reconciled with the Goodspeed translation of the New Testament, which reads, "You must repent, and every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, in order to have your sins forgiven" (Acts 2:38, in Translation of the New Testament, by Dr. Edgar Goodspeed, Greek Professor in University of Chicago)? How can the answer of the Bible Institute President be reconciled with the Williams translation, which reads, "You must repent—and, as an expression of it, let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ—that you may have your sins forgiven" (Acts 2:38, in Translation of the New Testament, by Dr. Chas. B. Williams, one-time Head of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and later Professor of Greek in Union University). Both of these Bible scholars are a part of the same religious communion as the President of the Bible Institute who said the purpose of baptism is, "Never in order to be saved."

After the Holy Spirit directed the men of Israel to repent and be baptized, He said, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2:40). They were to save themselves by complying with the conditions just given by the Spirit. They could do nothing in the way of procuring or meriting their own salvation, or of forgiving their own sins, but they could accept, in the Lord's way, the salvation which He offered to them. This they did without hesitation. The Bible says, "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized . . . And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:41, 47).

These men were honest, and when they learned God's will they

did it. Christ said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words . . . of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with all the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). Christ emphasizes that we must not be ashamed of Him or His words. Behold the balances! Jesus on the one side and His words on the other! We should as soon be ashamed of Christ as to be ashamed of what He said!

Jesus, when on the cross, had prayed for the men that were putting Him to death. He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." On the first Pentecost after His resurrection this prayer was answered. The men who had cried "Crucify Him," were forgiven of their sins when they repented and were baptized. This is what happened on Pentecost!

Sinner friend, if the men who crucified Christ were forgiven, you can be forgiven, too. You cannot sink so low that our Redeemer loses sight of you. He will reach down into the pit and lift you up if you will let Him. His ability to save you may be illustrated by an incident which happened in Scotland. At a crowded meeting in Edinburg, Professor Drummond held a letter in his hand, sent by a medical student, who asked Drummond if some word of hope could be spoken in his behalf. He had been piously trained, but he had been drawn down into sin, into drunkenness and vice. He feared he had fallen too low to be reclaimed. He asked if there were any hope for such a man. In answer the professor said, "As I walked through the city this morning I noticed a cloud like a pure white bank of snow resting over the slums. Whence came it? The great sun had sent down its beams into the city slums, the beams had gone among the puddles and had drawn out of them what they sought and had taken it aloft and purified it; and there it was resting above the city, a cloud as white as snow. The God who can make a white cloud out of dirty puddles, can make a white saint out of a dirty sinner." He can do it for you by washing you in the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, through faithful obedience to Him. William Cowper put it in these incomparable words:

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."

CONVERTING YOUTH

By JAMES D. WILLEFORD

Radio Sermon No. 211

February 12, 1956

When our Lord gave the Great Commission He commanded us to "teach all nations," and to "preach the gospel to every creature" (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15). These commands are the marching

orders of every Christian on earth, and it is our duty and privilege to obey them. All faithful Christians are making an honest effort to teach our neighbors, but most of our efforts are directed toward adults. We must do our best to convert men and women to Christ; but at the same time we should not overlook the children in our community.

A few years ago an American manufacturer said in his trade magazine, which went into the homes of thousands of his employees, that "Twenty-five million American boys and girls of this generation are not taught to read the Bible, to go to church and to pray." When one remembers that America has but thirty-five to forty million children this figure is appalling.

Mr. Paul H. Landis says, in his book on *Adolescence and Youth*, that "Only thirty-eight per cent of Protestant Youth go to church once per week." This means that of every one hundred children belonging to so-called "Protestant" parents, sixty-two are not receiving much religious instruction! Think of what an opportunity this situation presents to the church! Think of the challenge it presents to the Lord's people! What will the Lord say if His church ignores this challenging opportunity? We ask, in the words of the poet:

"—though the church is busy
Through all the live-long days,
In stately service lifting
Her voice of grown-up praise,
If childhood is neglected,
And left to stray a-wild,
Can the church expect the blessing
Of Him who loves the child?"

—Lois E. LeBar, from *Children in the Bible School*.

The church of Christ must be interested in all the children of the world. Surely we have sufficient Christianity that we will teach our own children, but our responsibility extends beyond our own. It extends to every child we know.

Our Lord commanded us to "preach the gospel to every creature," and children are included in this commission. Of course we cannot teach a small child, and then baptize it immediately, but if we start our teaching early the child will obey the gospel when it has reached the age of accountability.

It is much easier to teach a child than it is to teach an adult. Jesus said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me" (Matthew 19:14). All we have to do to win a child to Christ is to suffer or allow him to come to the Lord. If we will gain the consent of the child's parents, and then provide a way for him to be in Bible classes, he will be there. Most children ask for a chance to learn of Christ, and they will take advantage of every opportunity we offer them.

But it is far more difficult to reach adults. This difficulty is

illustrated by Christ in one of His parables. He said, "A certain man made a great supper, and he bade many: And he sent forth his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a field, and I must needs go out and see it; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. And the servant came, and told his lord these things . . . And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:16-23). Many adults are so preoccupied with the cares and pleasures of this life that it is difficult to win them to Christ. To "constrain them to come in" one must persist in long and patient effort, but all we have to do in winning youth is to, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Christ." Are we as parents and Christians making a way whereby the children of our land may be taught the gospel of our Lord? Are the congregations throughout America seeing to it that little children have the ways and means of coming to the Christ?

We should bring the gospel to children because their hearts are fertile soil in which to sow the seed of the kingdom. In the parable of the sower Jesus speaks of four kinds of soil—the hardened, thorny, rocky, and fertile ground,—and these four types of soil represent four types of human hearts. The hearts of many adults are too hardened, too shallow, or too filled with the cares of this life, to be influenced by the saving power of the gospel, but the hearts of children are always fertile soil for the gospel. This truth is well expressed by the poet, who said:

An angel paused in his downward flight
With a seed of love and truth and light,
And said, "Oh, where can this seed be sown
Where 'twill yield most fruit when fully grown?
To whom can this precious seed be given
That it will bear most fruit for earth and heaven?"
The Saviour heard and said, as He smiled,
"Place it at once in the heart of a child."

—Lois E. LeBar, in *Children in the Bible School*.

We should bring the gospel to children because they are depending upon us to give them what they need. Their faith in us is unbounded, and we should never let them down. We admit with shamefacedness that tens of thousands of children in our nation are asking for spiritual bread, but they are being given a stone. They cry for help, but stumblingblocks are being put in their way. In many instances, even parents will not dress their own children on Sunday morning, and provide ways for them to attend Bible classes. According to a recent article in the *Christian Advocate*, a Bible school teacher asked her

class of fourteen boys, "How many of you came to class without your breakfast," and thirteen hands went up!

We should bring the gospel to children because their characters are formed very early in life. Educators say the character pattern is formed by the time the child is six or seven. This is why one religious group has said, "Give us a child till he is seven, and he will always belong to us." The German National Socialists under Hitler said, "Give us a child of six to educate and he will belong to us for life." These groups have learned the value of early training. They have learned a lesson that every Christian on earth should know. If a religious order and a political regime can teach children so thoroughly that they will always abide by that teaching, is there any reasons why the Lord's church cannot do the same thing?

We are certain that it can be done, but to do it we must teach our children the fundamentals of Christianity. We must drill into them the New Testament teaching about the church, the plan of salvation, the Bible, the authority of Christ, and Christian living. They must be taught the difference between the holy and the profane, the human and the divine in religion.

Our Bible school teachers must realize their responsibility, and their opportunity. They must spend several hours each week in preparing lessons that will be distinctive and Bible centered. Their work will have an impact upon the present and future generations. Think of the great influence Confucius had upon the Chinese, and the world. Most of the time he never had more than seven or eight pupils in a class, and much of his teaching was done in the shade of some tree on a hillside, but hundreds of millions have been influenced by what he taught. If Confucius, through his moral teachings, could leave a lasting impression upon the world, there is no way to measure the lasting impression that good Bible school teachers can leave by teaching God's word. Our teachers never know the tremendous good they may be doing when they teach a class, even though it may consist of but three or four students. Teachers, parents and every Christian should remember that the Lord has promised: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

We should give the gospel to children because they have their whole lives ahead of them for Christian service. An evangelist was asked by a friend, "How many people were converted in your service tonight?" "Two and a half," was the reply. "What do you mean," asked the friend, "Were there two adults and one child converted?" "No," said the evangelist, "there were two children and one adult. The children gave their lives to Christ in their youth while the adult came with only half of his life."

It has been said that the life of an average person will influence ten thousand people within a period of one hundred and fifty years. This figure is based on the assumption that the person marries, has

three or four children, and thus through his posterity he influences this great multitude of people.

A story is told of a man who plucked an acorn and held it to his ear and this is what it said, "By and by the birds will come and nest in my branches. By and by I will furnish shade for the cattle. By and by I will be strong ribs of a great vessel, and the tempest will beat against me in vain, while I carry men across the ocean." "O foolish acorn, will you do all this?" the man asked. And the acorn replied, "Yes, God and I." Friends, if God can do all this with a lowly little acorn, how much greater things He can do with your child or with your neighbor's child!

We should bring the gospel to children because of the value of a child's soul. According to a recent editorial in one of our daily newspapers it takes ten thousand dollars to rear a child to the age of eighteen (*Abilene Reporter-News*, Aug. 8, 1953). There is hardly a parent listening to this broadcast who would not spend ten times this much, or even a hundred times this sum, to give his child a strong, healthy body, but there may be thousands in our audience who are not spending an hour a week, or a dollar a year to give their child a strong, healthy soul. Which is more important: the body which will return to the dust from whence it came, or the soul which will answer to God who made it? As we think about the value of the child's soul we are reminded of a poem entitled "Building a Temple." The poet said:

A builder builded a temple,
He wrought it with grace and skill;
Pillars and groins and arches
All fashioned to work his will.
Men said, as they saw its beauty,
"It shall never know decay;
Great is thy skill, O builder:
Thy fame shall endure for aye."

A teacher builded a temple
With loving and infinite care,
Planning each arch with patience,
Laying each stone with prayer.
None praised her unceasing efforts,
None knew of her wondrous plans;
For the temple the teacher builded
Was unseen by the eyes of man.

Gone is the builder's temple,
Crumbled into the dust;
Low lies each stately pillar,
Food for consuming rust.
But the temple the teacher builded
Will last while the ages roll,
For that beautiful unseen temple
Is a child's immortal soul.

—Thomas Curtis Clark.

We should bring the gospel to the children in our community for they will in turn open the hearts of their parents to the gospel. One of the best ways to reach parents is to reach their children first. In speaking of the influence of a child, an Old Testament prophet said, "And a little child shall lead them." This is true in many ways, but the influence of a child over its parents may be illustrated in a story about a lamb. An American traveler to Palestine once saw a shepherd carrying a lamb. He asked if the lamb's legs were broken. "Nothing of the kind," replied the shepherd. Pointing to an old sheep trotting gravely by his side, he said, "That is the mother, and she has a strage habit of wandering. The only way I can keep her with the flock is by taking her lamb and carrying it." Fellow Christians, we need to be carrying more lambs! If we would teach the children of America, our task of reaching their parents would be much easier.

Some of us in this nation-wide audience may ask, "What can we do to teach the children of our community?" One thing we can do is to contact all the parents in our section of town, and secure their permission for us to pick up their children for the Lord's day Bible classes. If we find more children than we can transport in our own car we can ask other members of the church to help us. In this way members of the church can bring several million children to the Lord's house for Bible instruction. If you do not believe there is a need for this kind of work take a religious census of your town, and see how many children are not in Sunday school. A few weeks ago I preached for a congregation which has its Bible school at nine, and its worship at ten on Sunday morning. The worship service was concluded by eleven, and during the hour from eleven till twelve, when most church services were being conducted, I drove across the city. It was distressing to observe the number of children at play, in their everyday clothes, who had not been to Bible school. And yet this city is noted for its colleges and churches! If this situation exists in a "church town," what must be the picture in many of America's cities?

Something more we may do to teach children is to have Bible classes in our homes. A number of godly women across the country have been following this course. They invite the small children who live nearby to come into their homes for one or more study periods each week. With hardly an exception, these mothers report that the children arrive early, and clamor for a chance to hear about Jesus. Their little souls "hunger and thirst after righteousness," and it is the exalted privilege of these Christian women to fill that need.

The teaching of children is one of the most fruitful ways of carrying out the commission of our Lord. It is something that every one of us can do. This is one good work that the elderly can do for they have a way with children. Grey hair is not a handicap in reaching children for where is the child who does not love the elderly? Christians who are young in the faith can carry out the Lord's commission by teaching children, for even babes in Christ know enough to teach those who are young in years. This is a work that our teen-age boys and girls can do, and our four and five year olds can help by inviting their little friends to Bible classes. We are pleading for the children

of America. They have a right to the truth of God's word, but many of them are being neglected or abused. Their hearts are being filled with the chaff of atheism, worldliness, and indifference. It is our obligation as Christians to teach them the gospel, and we can change the face of the world within two generations if we will teach the children of our day. In I Peter 4:17 the apostle said, "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" We usually apply this question to people who refuse to believe the gospel, repent of their sins, and be baptized into Christ, but the question is equally applicable to the Lord's people. If we fail to teach the children in our community, that they may in time obey the truth, we have failed to fully obey the gospel. And if we fail the burden of our failure must rest squarely upon our shoulders, and the question, "What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God" will burn into our conscience until time shall be no more.

CONVERSION OF AN ETHIOPIAN

By JAMES D. WILLEFORD

Radio Sermon No. 212

February 19, 1956

In our day the honest seeker for the truth must make an important decision. He must decide whether he will follow the modern day examples of conversion, or the examples given in the New Testament. He must decide whether he will listen to popular revivalists or to the inspired apostles of Christ. Many of the evangelists we hear spend a major portion of their time in reciting their version of how people are saved from sins. They give examples of conversion, and these cases are recited to the people for a double purpose: first, to show sinners the way into the kingdom; and second, to move them to action. Such examples have been found so effective that many preachers use them freely in their sermons.

But the Lord knew, before men discovered it, the power there is in examples to make a matter plain, and also to stimulate men to action, and so He devoted one book in the New Testament to such recitals. The book of Acts has been called the book of conversions because it is filled with so many accounts of how people were converted to Christ. If one were to take out of Acts everything that is closely connected with conversion, he would have very little left in the book.

We have then, in these days, two classes of examples of conversion from which to make a selection. We can select a modern case of conversion or we can select a Bible case as our guide. For our own part we prefer to be guided by the examples which are written in the Bible. We can be sure that these cases were genuine for they passed twice under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit

directed the first century preachers in their teaching, and He guided the pen of Luke as he recorded these conversions in the book of Acts. So we may say that these cases of conversion have passed twice under the inspection of the Spirit of God.

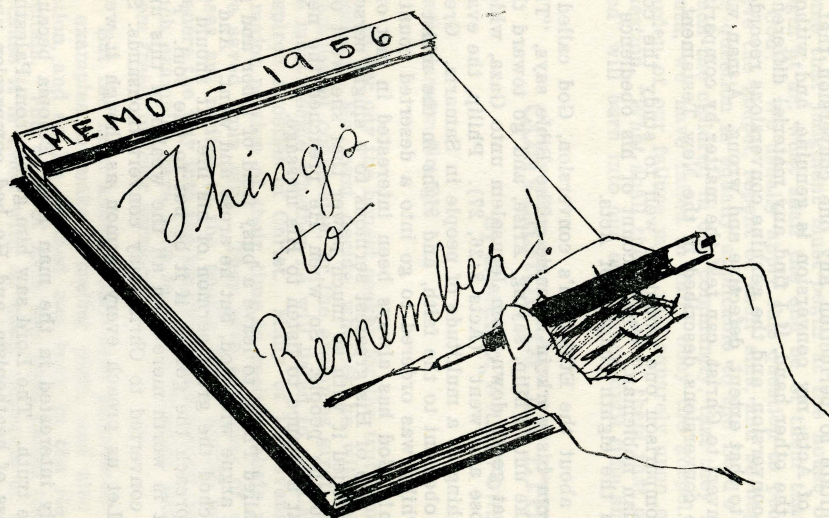
It follows from these considerations that if I, in coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, imitate to perfection any one conversion that is recorded in the book of Acts, my conversion is genuine, and without any defect in it. On the other hand, if I find any material difference between my supposed conversion, and the genuine conversions recorded in Acts, then mine is, to that extent, defective and wrong. A man who supposes himself a convert to Christ, can test the matter by comparing his own case with the conversions described in the New Testament.

In making this comparison one would do well to study the conversion of the Ethiopian nobleman. The account of his obedience to the gospel is found in the eighth chapter of Acts.

In order to bring about the Ethiopian's conversion, God called a very busy preacher from his work in Samaria. The Bible says, "The angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went" (Acts 8:26, 27). Philip, the evangelist, had been preaching to a multitude of people in Samaria. Great numbers had become obedient to the faith, and right in the midst of this gospel meeting Philip was ordered to go into a deserted country to preach to one man! God has always been interested in just one soul. Christ preached one of His greatest sermons to a single person, a woman. But He preached it with so much power that she went out into the city and told the people. So when He preached the next sermon He had a great audience to listen to His message.

When the angel called Philip to leave a busy field of labor and go to one soul, he did not argue with God, but he arose and went. And to this one man he preached the great sermon of his life. It should be a privilege for us to preach the gospel, if it be but to one soul. For if that soul be won, it is worth more than all the wealth of this universe. That one soul converted to Christ may convert thousands. So, let us do our best. Let us preach every sermon as though it were our last.

God was especially interested in the man from Ethiopia because he wanted to know the truth. The Lord saw him going from Palestine down into the darkness of heathenism, and He had compassion upon him. The heavenly Father knew that something must be done for him before he went away, or he would likely die without hearing the name of Christ. His first step in making a Christian of this man was to send an angel, not to the man to be converted, but to the preacher. Have you ever wondered why God did this? Why did not the Lord send the angel to the sinner, and leave the preacher in Samaria? We have often wondered why God did not ordain that angels should preach the gospel. They could go with speed swifter than light and with burning words of eloquence and without remuneration, and preach to



✦ Lessons To Remember . . .

"MAN DOES NOT STAND ALONE"	Jan. 1, 1956
"REPENTANCE"	Jan. 8, 1956
"REPENTANCE AND UNSCRIPTURAL MARRIAGES"	Jan. 15, 1956
"THE GOOD CONFESSION"	Jan. 22, 1956
"CALL NO MAN COMMON"	Jan. 29, 1956
"WHAT HAPPENED ON PENTECOST?"	Feb. 5, 1956
"CONVERTING YOUTH"	Feb. 12, 1956
"CONVERSION OF THE EUNUCH"	Feb. 19, 1956
"FIRST THINGS FIRST"	Feb. 26, 1956
"CONVERSION OF PAUL"	Mar. 4, 1956
"OUR RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING THE TRUTH"	Mar. 11, 1956
"CONVERSION OF CORNELIUS"	Mar. 18, 1956
"CHURCH AND STATE"	Mar. 25, 1956
"REMEMBER THE POOR"	Apr. 1, 1956
"CONVERSION OF LYDIA"	Apr. 8, 1956

"BE NOT DECEIVED"	Apr. 15, 1956
"CONVERSION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER"	Apr. 22, 1956
"IS THE BIBLE FILLED WITH ERRORS?"	Apr. 29, 1956
"NON-CONVERSION OF FELIX"	May 6, 1956
"THIS TOO, SHALL PASS"	May 13, 1956
"THE FIRST COMMANDMENT"	May 20, 1956
"THE SECOND COMMANDMENT"	May 27, 1956
"THE THIRD COMMANDMENT"	June 3, 1956
"THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT"	June 10, 1956
"THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT"	June 17, 1956
"THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT"	June 24, 1956
"THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT"	July 1, 1956
"THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT"	July 8, 1956
"THE NINTH COMMANDMENT"	July 15, 1956
"THE TENTH COMMANDMENT"	July 22, 1956
"THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT"	July 29, 1956

Subject to Possible Change

✦ Speaker to Remember

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the dying millions. We cannot answer why God does not permit angels to preach, but there is one thing that we do know, and it is that He has ordained that man shall preach the gospel, and that man shall be saved through the instrumentality of man. The Bible says, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Corinthians 1:21). In giving His commission our Lord said to His apostles, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). In writing to the Romans Paul said, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:13, 14). Christ sent the apostle Paul to the Gentiles, "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). So the Lord has ordained that men shall teach men, and for this reason no sinner will ever receive direct instruction from one of these heavenly beings.

The angel ordered Philip to leave Samaria and go to the road which led from Jerusalem to Gaza, and the Bible says that upon his arrival he beheld "a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship" (Acts 8:27). The divine record does not give us the name of this man, but it does state that he was the treasurer of the kingdom of Ethiopia. He was a very distinguished citizen, and by his faithfulness and his business ability he had gained the confidence of his queen, so that she had given him charge of all her treasure. His position was an honored one, for Ethiopia was one of the richest and most influential countries of that age.

The Ethiopian treasurer was either a Jew or a proselyte for he had been to Jerusalem to worship, according to the law of Moses. His example puts millions of professed Christians to shame. Think how far he had to go for worship—a distance of about a thousand miles. He had no modern means of transportation, such as a car, a train or an airplane, but he traveled in a chariot, perhaps at the rate of five or six miles an hour. He had to absent himself from his business for about six weeks so he could go and worship God. Here was a man whose business in every way was more weighty than ours, and upon whom more responsibility rested than rests upon most of us, and yet his convictions toward duty and toward God came first.

After the treasurer of Ethiopia had worshiped in Jerusalem, he started for home in his chariot. As he rode along, he read the Bible. How unusual it is to see this practice in our day! As we travel by bus and train we see people reading everything but the Bible. In fact, it is a little embarrassing to some to get on the train and begin to read the Bible. It is such an unusual thing that all eyes stare at the reader, and someone will say, "You must be a preacher." Why? Because it is not common to see people reading the Bible as they travel.

As the Ethiopian cabinet officer was reading the Old Testament

Scriptures, he came to the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, as now marked in our Bibles. Luke says, "The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth" (Acts 8:32, 33). He was reading aloud for the Bible says Philip heard him. Perhaps he had discovered what many others have, that one can better center his attention upon a printed page by reading aloud than he can by reading silently.

While the Ethiopian was reading the passage from Isaiah, "The Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot," and the Bible says, "Philip ran thither to him . . . and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?" This was a rather abrupt and singular way for Philip to begin his conversation, but it may be that he could tell from the tone of the man's voice and the expression on his face that he was troubled. The eunuch was not offended at Philip's question, and in response to it he asked, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" He did not ask, "How can I understand except I dream a dream," or "How can I understand except I see a vision," or "How can I understand except the Holy Spirit explain the word?" No, but he asked, "How can I except some man guide me?"

The treasurer of Ethiopia pointed to the language of Isaiah, and he asked Philip, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" It is impossible for any man who has never heard the story of the Lord Jesus Christ as written in the New Testament, to read the passage in Isaiah and not have some questions arise in his mind. Reading the Old Testament without the light of the New Testament is a perplexing business. Someone has said, "The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed." The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah cannot be fully explained without the light thrown upon it by the New Testament.

The Ethiopian eunuch was a teachable inquirer, and when he read the prophecy about Christ in the book of Isaiah, he said, "I wonder what that means?" The eunuch was teachable, and what a beautiful trait is this. It is one of the first characteristics of honesty. To be stubborn, dogmatical, and conceited is to deprive oneself of the gift of knowledge. How few are teachable. Many people go to the Bible to find proof of what they already believe. The humble, teachable mind is a thing to be coveted. The mind that can empty itself and say when it approaches the Bible, "I will accept what this book says, and not try to twist it to suit my preconceived opinions," is the mind that is ready to discover great truths.

When the treasurer of Ethiopia asked Philip to explain Isaiah's prophecy, the Bible says, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). What else could he preach? There is no other message to offer a dying world. Paul said to the Corinthians: "I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Paul could

have preached philosophy, for he was a philosopher, but he did not do it. He went not to the Corinthians in excellency of speech or of man's wisdom. He said to the church in Galatia: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," and to the Roman Christians the apostle said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16).

The greatest sensation that any man could create in some community today would be to simply preach the plain old gospel. The world is just as hungry for it now as it was in the days of Philip, and that preacher who imagines that it is obsolete, and feels called upon to preach upon ethics or philosophy, will find himself preaching to empty pews. A distinguished minister, in one of the large cities of the East, who had been preaching sensational sermons until his congregation had left him, wondered at the cause. One morning, as he entered the pulpit, he saw placed on the pulpit a piece of paper. He read, "You have taken away my Lord and I know not where you have laid Him." He understood why the people had forsaken the church.

When the man from Ethiopia read Isaiah 53, he asked, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" The Bible says that Philip began at this same scripture, and preached to him Jesus, and this was the answer to his question. The passage was not written about Isaiah himself, or any other man, but about Jesus, the Son of God. In preaching Jesus, Philip told the story of the birth, the life, and the death of the Son of God. It has been related that Voltaire, the great French infidel, said if he could be convinced that the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is genuine, he would concede that at least one prediction of the prophets was fulfilled. The Ethiopian cabinet officer believed the book of Isaiah to be God's word, and so Philip's task was an easy one, for the officer could not fail to see of whom the prophet wrote.

Philip continued with his conversational sermon until the chariot drove up to a stream, or to a pool of water, when the eunuch said, "Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Did you ever stop and ask yourself how he happened to ask that question? We are told that Philip preached Jesus to the man; but while he was preaching Jesus, the man found out that he had to be baptized, and he asked the question, "What hinders me?" He did not wait for the preacher to urge him to do his duty; but he first put the matter before the preacher as the desire of his heart.

We have had friends say, "We would like your preaching better if you would just preach Christ, and not speak of baptism." We would like to gratify our friends, but we find it impossible to accede to their wishes in this matter. When Philip preached Christ to the Ethiopian treasurer, baptism was a part of the sermon. Indeed, it is impossible to preach Christ fully and leave baptism out of the sermon. One has to mention baptism early in the story of Jesus; for he was baptized by John; and at the end of the story; for He commanded His disciples to go and baptize men in every nation. One must leave out both of

these chapters in the history of Christ if he leaves out baptism. It is a mutilated gospel that leaves baptism out of the sermons addressed to sinners. When men preach Jesus as they should, baptism is a part of the sermon.

When the Ethiopian learned his duty to be baptized, and Philip's willingness to baptize him, the Bible says, "He commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him" (Acts 8:38). What was this act which was called baptism? The word itself means an immersion, and the Bible calls it a burial (Romans 6:4). It is clearly seen that neither Philip nor the eunuch would have gone into the water if the purpose had been merely to sprinkle or pour a small quantity of water upon the Ethiopian. The same reasons precisely which now keep preachers who practice sprinkling out of the water would have kept Philip and the eunuch out of it. On the other hand, the same necessity which now compels those who practice immersion to go into the water compelled Philip and the eunuch to do so; and from this conclusion the candid mind can find no escape.

An outstanding Greek scholar has said, "If we knew nothing at all of the meaning of the word baptize, whether in English or Greek, except the single fact that some say it means to sprinkle, and others that it means to immerse, this passage alone would settle the question forever with all whose minds are free to follow implicitly the obvious meaning of the Scriptures. The account of the eunuch's conversion administers rebuke at several points to many teachers of our age, and it should call them back with trembling to the teaching and practice of the inspired evangelists" (J. W. McGarvey, in *Commentary on Acts*, p. 160).

In his commentary, John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian Church, says, "Here we see the rite used among the men of old time in baptism; for they put all the body into the water. Now the use is this, that the minister doth only sprinkle the body or the head" (*Commentary*, on Acts 8:38).

Homersham Cox, Church of England scholar, says, "This (immersion) was clearly the mode of baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, 'They both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him'" (*The First Century of Christianity* (Foot-note), p. 277).

The Ethiopian treasurer, and every other person whose conversion is recorded in the book of Acts, asked to be baptized immediately. There is no case under the apostolic ministry where baptism was deferred. The man that is God-approved, is the man that responds to his duty when he learns of it. The eunuch never even stopped to think about what friends back home would say. In effect he said, "I see the truth. What doth hinder me from walking therein?" And he was baptized immediately.

When the Ethiopian asked Philip to baptize him, the evangelist might have said, "We will have to first go back to Jerusalem, call for

a meeting of the church and hear an experience," or "We must first take a vote, and if the church decides that you should be baptized, then I will baptize you." No, Philip did not make any such suggestion, and there is no indication within the New Testament that any inspired man ever called for a vote to determine whether a candidate should be baptized. It is certain that Philip did not call for a vote at Samaria nor in the eunuch's case, for there was no church present in either case.

Some religious leaders of our day are not willing to follow this New Testament example. In a book entitled, *History of Denton County Baptist Association* we have recorded this story:

"An incident occurred in the Pilot Point church during Reverend J. B. Cole's pastorate, which involved a point of doctrine that subjected Pastor Cole to criticism, and gave the incident much publicity and notoriety. Pastor Cole went fishing one day with a business man who was not a Christian, and he availed himself of the opportunity to talk to the lost man about his unsaved condition, and led him to an acceptance of Christ. Jo Ives, the man converted, said to Pastor Cole, 'Here is water, what doth hinder me from being baptized?' Obviously Brother Cole thought of the story of Philip and the eunuch, and, taking that incident as an example, he led Mr. Ives out into the water and baptized him. Reverend Cole had been a Baptist but a short time and was not up on their conception of baptism, and how and when it should be administered.

"The news of the incident soon spread among the members, and then the show began. The following Sunday Mr. Ives presented himself to the church, asking membership, and his application was rejected and he was hurt at the action of the church and turned to another church, which readily accepted his baptism. The criticism of the pastor caused him to ask a committee of eminent brethren to sit in judgment upon his conduct . . . After reviewing the details of the incident they wrote the church advising it to drop the matter, and Pastor Cole to go his way, but not to repeat the act" (*History of the Denton Baptist Association*, by James N. Rayzor, pp. 82, 83).

After the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized the Bible says, "He went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). May we say to you that after Christ Jesus gave His commission, until the book of Revelation was written, there is not a single case on record where any man ever rejoiced on account of sins forgiven until after he was baptized.

Many years ago one of the old pioneer preachers was traveling through Ohio preaching, and having preached in the forenoon, he mounted his horse to go to another appointment, when, as he rode along, a stranger fell in with him. He said, "Mr. Stone, I heard you preach this morning; here is a stream of water; I want to be baptized. What hinders me?" Stone was reminded of the story of Philip and the eunuch, and he instantly resolved to follow the divine example. So he said, "If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart you may." The stranger answered, "I do believe on Him Him with all my heart." "Dismount then," said Stone, "and let us go

down into the water." They did so, and when they came up out of the stream they parted—never to see each other again. Did Stone do right? Did that man do right? If they did not, Philip and the eunuch did wrong. If you imitate this inspired example, will you do right? You must, if you have the right Bible to guide you. Will you do it at once, and rejoice in the forgiveness of your sins? Now is the accepted time. Today is the Lord's time. The Ethiopian stopped the preacher before he had finished the sermon. Life is too short to lose a day, and heaven is too grand to miss. Come to Christ, we pray you, and come now.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

By JAMES D. WILLEFORD

Radio Sermon No. 213

February 26, 1956

In the land of Israel, during the Old Testament period, when a Hebrew cut his first sheaf of grain at the beginning harvest he was obligated to give it to Jehovah. The Lord said, "The first of the first-fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord" (Exodus 23:19).

When a priest of Israel approached the altar of God with an animal sacrifice, the Lord said, "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year" (Exodus 12:5). But, before the last book of the Old Testament was written, the people of God had forgotten His instructions. The Old Testament closes with God saying, "Ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord" (Malachi 1:13). In an effort to challenge His people to better things, and to shame them, the God of Israel said, "Offer it (the lame and the sick) now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?" (Malachi 1:8).

Why did God require His people to give Him the best of their fruit and their flocks? He made this demand of them because the gift represented the giver. Unless they gave up something they wanted for themselves, it was not a sacrifice. For every sick lamb that was offered, God knew there was a sick heart in the person who made the offering; for every lame bullock that was offered, God knew that an indifferent soul had trudged its weary way to His altar.

The priests of Israel, who made the offerings for the people, had to be men without any physical deformity. The Lord said unto Moses, "Speak unto Aaron, saying, Whosoever he be of thy seed in their generations that hath any blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose,

or any thing superfluous. Or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, or crookbackt, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken; No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God" (Leviticus 21:17-21).

The Lord added, "He shall eat the bread of his God, both of the most holy, and of the holy. Only he shall not go in unto the vail, nor come nigh unto the altar, because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my sanctuaries: for I the Lord do sanctify them" (Leviticus 21:22, 23).

When God sanctified an altar or a life, He demanded that it be kept holy. Any thing that would defile His altar, or the life of His people, was forbidden. In the days of Micah the prophet, the children of Israel were not living righteously, but they were very careful to make their offerings as prescribed by the law. The prophet of God pointed out the futility of sacrifices without godly living. He asked, "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Micah taught the people of Israel that all the sacrifices in the world would not gain the approval of God as long as their daily living did not conform to His will. It was necessary that every offering be backed up by an honest heart and a sincere effort to serve God. To the son of Abraham, Micah said, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

Have you ever asked, "Why did God set such a high standard for His people, and why did He demand that we give Him first place in our hearts and lives?" He set a high standard because He wants us to strive for perfection; He asks us to be holy even as He is holy. He asks for first place in our hearts for if He asked for less He should receive no place there. We give Him little enough as it is! Could we worship Him who made us if He asked no more of us than we ask of one another? When our Lord said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," He performed one of the kindest services He ever rendered to His creatures.

In requiring that we put Him first, our Father expects us to exalt His kingdom in our hearts. Christ said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). What our attitude toward the kingdom should be, is well illustrated in one of the Lord's parables. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matthew 13:45, 46). The Lord knows the value of the kingdom and He compares it to the pearl of great price. It is the one pearl which is more valuable than all the other pearls in the world. The kingdom is of such great value that we should give up any desire of

our heart which obstructs our entrance into it, or impedes our progress after entering.

It has been our good pleasure to know a number of Christians who have learned to put the kingdom of God first. At the moment we are thinking of a family who lived for several years in Wisconsin. They moved from Florida to the Badger State in order to care for the wife's invalid father. The little town in which they lived was fifty-five miles from the city where they assembled with other Christians to worship God. Their responsibilities at home were many, and the distance they had to drive for worship was one hundred ten miles round trip, but they were not deterred by these obstacles. They made arrangements for someone to care for the wife's father so they could be at the Lord's day worship. They drove over icy roads, through snow and sleet, when the temperature was thirty below zero, that they might assemble with the Lord's people to worship God. During four years they missed the Sunday worship only six times, and this was due to illness. Such an example is indeed an inspiration to faithful children of God.

We have been privileged to know entire congregations that are putting the kingdom of God first. Their love for Christ and His church is so impelling that they make many sacrifices for His cause. They give liberally, and then borrow money to help spread the gospel in destitute fields. To such faithful congregations, the language of the apostle Paul addressed to the church at Thessalonica, is quite appropriate. The apostle said, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Thessalonians 1:2, 3).

While we know of many who are putting the church first, we know some who are failing in this respect. A few years ago we lived in the same town with a professional man who had an invalid wife. This man was a member of the church, but he had forsaken the worship services on the Lord's day. He had done what God forbade when He said, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25). We pointed this Scripture out to our friend, and we pleaded with him to be faithful in worshiping on the Lord's day, but we were unsuccessful. To our persistent efforts, he always replied, "My wife is an invalid, and when I am not in my office I feel that I must be with her." This sounded like a plausible reason for his not attending all the services of the church, but we are convinced that if our friend wanted to put the kingdom of God first, he could arrange for one hour of worship each week. Our conviction was borne out in time, for later, when our professional friend was elected to a high office in his lodge, he encountered no difficulty in being away from home to transact its business. He cared more for a human lodge than he did for the kingdom of God, and he had used his invalid wife to justify his failure to put it first.

There are many people in the world today who put about everything ahead of the church. With them business, family and pleasure

take precedence over the kingdom of God. This attitude is well illustrated in an editorial written last year in one of our daily newspapers. The editorial is a discussion of Homecoming activities at one of America's largest religious universities. Two of these activities were: the dedication of a new Bible building, and the playing of a football game. In writing of these two events, the editor says, "Old Baylor who attend Homecoming without the intention of going to the football game tomorrow could hold their meeting in a telephone booth. It's the contest at Baylor Stadium that pulls them. All the other activities are preliminary to what happens after 2 p.m. Saturday when the referee signals for the kickoff. The Tidwell Bible Building dedication is assured of a good turnout because the football game is drawing old Baylor from far and near . . . Adding it up, whatever benefit Baylor derives from its Homecoming celebration must be chalked up to the main attraction, football (The Waco Times-Herald, October 22, 1954). Let us be clearly understood. We are not finding fault with any clean sport which is honorably played, but we are concerned about the future of our nation when its citizens become more interested in a football game than they are in the dedication of a Bible building.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ names something more that we must put first in our lives. He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness." In Romans 1:17 the apostle Paul says God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel. To put His righteousness first is to put His word first; it is to obey His will at all costs. Have we done this? Can we honestly say, "Lord, it matters not what your command may be; we have sincerely tried to obey it"?

Let us take some of the Lord's commands and put ourselves to the test. In this way we can learn whether or not we are putting His righteousness first. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Have we really obeyed this Scripture? If not, then we have failed to put God's righteousness first.

Christ spoke a parable to His disciples to teach them the tragedy of hoarding the material blessings He has granted to us. In the parable He said, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

The Lord has never condemned His people for making money, if it is made honestly; but He does forbid the hoarding of it. In the book

of James He says to men who had amassed great wealth, "Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you" (James 5:33). In the first century, when the book of James was written, men did not have banks as we have today. Some buried their gold in the earth, where it tended to rust, and where it could do no good. Buried treasure never preached a gospel sermon, nor fed a hungry child. It never performed one good deed. This is why Christ admonishes us to use our money in a way to lay up treasures in heaven for He says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

The difficulty of our putting souls above shekels is demonstrated by an incident which occurred in an East Texas community. In 1930 oil was discovered in that part of the state, and several wells were drilled on a piece of property which belonged to a small church of forty-three members. When the first well came in the members met to determine what would be done with the money. Would they use it in sending missionaries to the lost people of the world, or in caring for widows and orphans? No, they would not use it for such holy purposes. The only way they could reach an agreement was for the money to be equally divided among the membership! And at this same meeting they voted not to receive any more members into the church! We understand that Robert Ripley wrote this incident up in his "Believe It or Not" column, under the title, "The Only Church in the World Which Does Not Want Any More Members."

But let us take another command of Christ and see if we are putting God's righteousness first. In Matthew 5:23, 24, our Lord said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24). This Scripture teaches that reconciliation to a brother takes precedence over worship. If we come into the Lord's house with the knowledge that a brother has ought against us, we cannot worship acceptably until we effect a reconciliation, or at least make an honest effort to do so. Two members of the church cannot come into the assembly, refuse to speak to one another, and still receive God's approval.

A few years ago Brother Charles Brewer was conducting a series of gospel meetings for a small church in the hills of eastern Tennessee. He said that during the meetings he learned of two men in the congregation who would not speak to one another. They went so far in their estrangement that they would not appear in the building at the same time. In order to prevent their being in the service together they adopted a unique, but childish plan. They each tried to arrive at the building first, and the one who succeeded sat down on the front steps. When the second brother arrived, seeing the first brother already at the building, he turned and went back home.

When one brother offends another the Lord commands them both to try for a reconciliation. The offended must go to the offender, and the offender must go to the offended (Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15, 16). The one who has been offended has no scriptural right to say, "John Doe offended me, and I am under no obligation to go to him; let him

come to me." When two people are estranged, and they both obey the Lord, they will meet one another halfway and settle their differences. We have known of this very thing happening. A few years ago two farmers in East Texas had a misunderstanding, and for some time they would not speak to one another. But after a while the realization of their sin dawned upon them about the same time, and when this happened each farmer started toward the home of the other. They met in the road about halfway between their homes, and there they begged one another's forgiveness, and together they asked divine mercy.

Will you put the kingdom of God and His righteousness first in your life? Will you accept His will, and lovingly obey it? Will you believe in Christ, repent of your sins, and be baptized in the Lord's name because these commands are a part of His word? (Mark 16:15, 16; Luke 13:3; Matthew 28:18, 19).

While Christ was dying on the cross He cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" Did you ever ask, "What did the Lord mean by this cry? Was He really forsaken by His heavenly Father?" Yes, in that awful moment on the cross God turned away from His Son, and He did so because He was looking at us. He put us first, in the death of His Son, that we might put Him first in seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Receipts	\$27,613.31
Expenditures	26,127.41
Receipts Exceed Expenditures by	\$ 1,485.90

This abbreviated financial statement is being made in order to have the Report printed without delay. Any information other than these figures will be given gladly on request and up-to-date statements printed at regular intervals.

HIGHLAND CHURCH OF CHRIST
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